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ABSTRACT

The article presents an overview of the development and implementation of a competency-based special education teacher training program into a course-based format. The authors discuss the processes through which (1) competencies were identified and validated, (2) competencies were incorporated into existing courses, (3) procedures were established for evaluation of competency attainment, and (4) instruments and processes were developed for overall program evaluation. (Author)

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TRAINING SPECIAL EDUCATORS FOR THE 1980'S: A COURSE COMPETENCY BASED TRAINING PROGRAM FOR THE MULTI-SKILLED PROFESSIONAL

A Paper Submitted for Publication from
The World Congress on Future Special
Education

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an overview of the development and implementation of a competency-based special education teacher training program into a course-based format. The authors discuss the processes through which 1) competencies were identified and validated, 2) competencies were incorporated into existing courses, 3) procedures were established for evaluation of competency attainment and 4) instruments and processes were developed for overall program evaluation.

Introduction

This paper describes the development and implementation of a graduate training program in special education at the University of Denver. The major components of the program are: 1) The process of identifying and validating competencies, 2) the implementation of a competency based program using a typical university course-based structure, and 3) evaluation of competency attainment and overall program effectiveness.

The philosophy of the Special Edcuation Program is based on a multi-faceted approach to educating all handicapped children, with high priority given to delivery models which provide a continuum of services for all exceptional children. Students are prepared to be multi-skilled professionals with competencies in a variety of areas of special education. The faculty and advisory groups to the training program believe that this sets a future direction for the field enabling professionals to work with a wider variety of exceptional learners.

Identification and Validation of Competencies

Table I presents a process model for identifying and validating training competencies. This includes a writing team, research of current literature, use of a consumer advisory group, and a professional group from other universities and agencies. This is an ongoing process and competencies are revised annually to reflect future directions in the field, new legislation and the needs expressed by those who employ the program graduates.

Three stages were involved in the development of competencies in the special education program. Stage I was determination of competency areas. Stage II involved analysis of competency areas and stratification into sub-competencies and logical sequences. Stage III integrated competencies into courses by topic and functional practicality.

Table I

The Development of a
Competency-Based Teacher Education Program

INPUT	PROCESS	OUTPUT
view of literature	Compilation of Data	Self-Rating Scale
nsumer Advisory Board	Analysis of Data	Competency-based Course Work
iversities and Agencies	Stratification into areas, Sub-competencies, and Logical Sequences	Competency-based Field Experience
iting team	Integration into Courses	Evaluation Instruments
	Creation of New Courses	
	Development of Instruments and Procedures to Measure Attainment of Competency	

Stage I - Determination of Competency Areas:

This stage involves studying three areas to determine consumer needs, theoretical considerations and the current "state of the art."

(1) Consumers (public schools, clinical settings, etc.) were surveyed to determine competencies sought and areas evaluated by employers;

(2) The literature was researched to determine theoretical basis for competencies;

(3) Universities with similar special education programs were studied to determine if a common body of competencies was predominant.

Stage II - Analysis of Competencies:

Most competencies identified by employers, the literature or other universities were often broad statements of general ability. Therefore, after combining similar competencies and listing in categorical arrangements, sub-competencies or en-route objectives were determined. Verification of the competencies by the advisory committee to the special education program (primarily consumers) was attained.

Stage III - Integration with Courses:

As many courses were already listed as university offerings leading to a degree in special education, the competencies were analyzed first by topic area to determine which were a) already being taught or, b) could be integrated into existing subject areas. Finally, areas not covered in existing courses were organized into new courses.

Implementation

The usual university course based format has been retained to facilitate inter-departmental training and certification requirements of states and professional organizations. The identified competencies to be expected of students have been matched with the content of existing courses and with field assignments.

Successful "course completion" is determined by instruments that have been designed to assess competency attainment. It is expected that the competencies that are learned in a course will all be achieved at the conclusion of the course. Success in competency attainment will constitute successful course completion. A wide variety of instruments will be presented including: observation systems, written examinations, simulations and projects. As new competencies are incorporated into the progam, course content changes and instrumentation for measurement of competencies is modified to take these new competencies into account.

Evaluation Process

Evaluation of competencies has been a major concern in the area of competency based teacher education. The blending of courses, field experiences, and close supervision by faculty has enabled careful evaluation and documentation of competencies achieved by students. Data recording systems have been employed to provide graduate student profiles for planning course work and field experiences to meet competency requirements. Team advising by faculty has also facilitated the evaluation and planning for each student.

Field work is evaluated through a three tiered supervisory process.
(1) field based supervision provided by a cooperating professional;

(2) supervision provided by university personnel based on an observational model; and (3) peer-supervision, based on a problem-solving model, by other practicum students.

The program as a whole is evaluated by a series of processes. These include: graduate follow-up study, structured interviews with graduates and their supervisors, evaluation instruments for field experiences, and task analysis of faculty activities. The program evaluation is described using a Provus Discrepancy Evaluation Model. The model employs twelve evaluation instruments feeding a comprehensive data system. Table II shows the process through which students go and the evaluation points in the process.

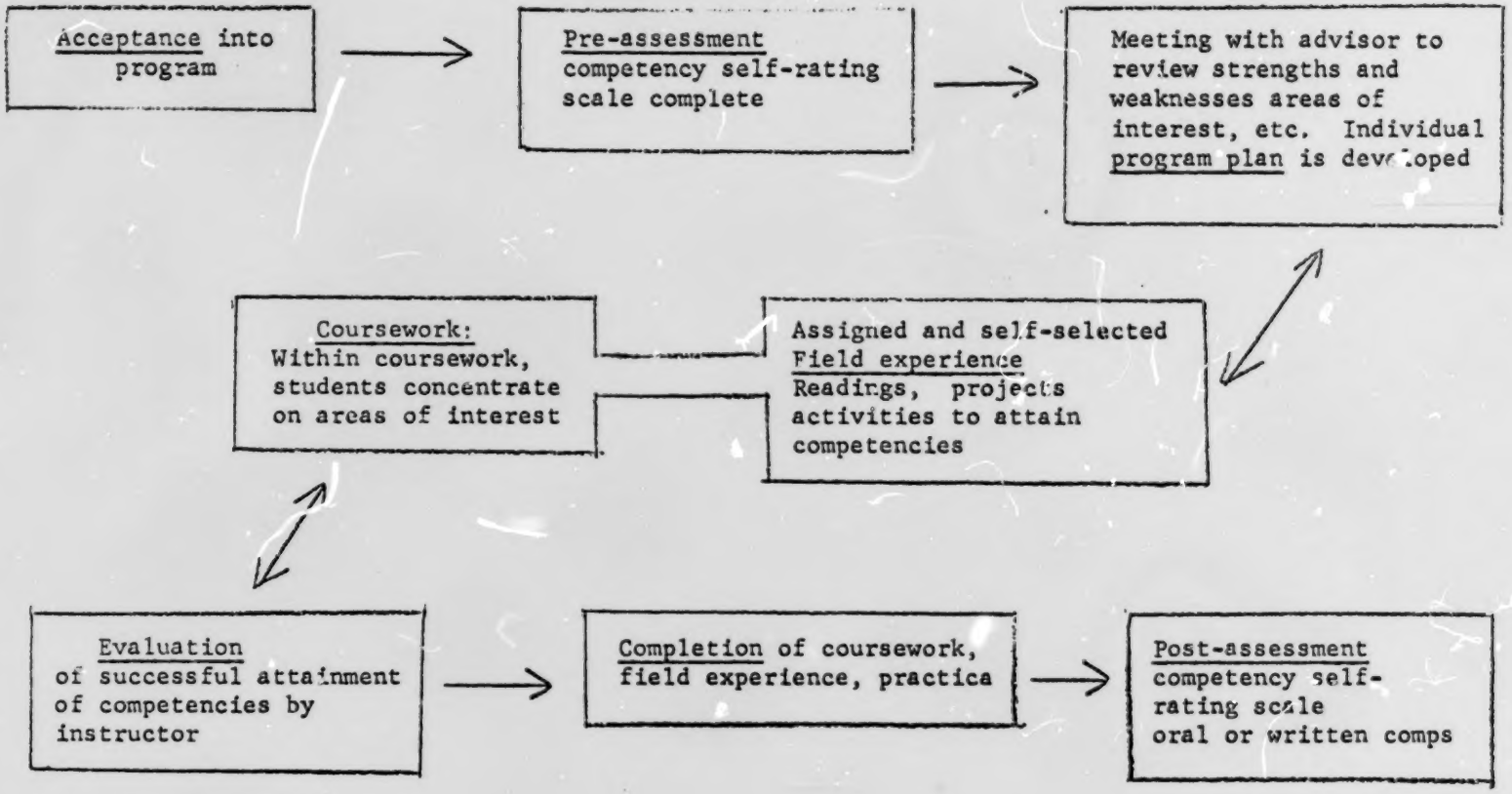
A Competancy Self-Rating Scale is currently being developed to be used as a pre-assessment/post-assessment instrument. The information provided by this scale will allow the student's advisor to individualize the program for each student. It will also provide the foundation for on-going evaluation and counseling concerning skill areas as the student progresses through the program. Post-assessment will also offer the student visible evidence of growth.

Summary

Course-based and competency-based approaches to teacher training needs not be dichotomous. The program at the University of Denver has demonstrated that competencies can be incorporated harmoniously into a course-based structure. Effective methods for evaluation of the integration of knowledge and application through courses and field work can be achieved through the methods presented in the paper.

Table II

Implementation of Compentency-Based Teacher Education


Acceptance into program
Pre-assessment competency self-rating scale complete
Meeting with advisor to review strengths and weaknesses areas of interest, etc. Individual program plan is developed
Coursework: Within coursework, students concentrate on areas of interest
Assigned and self-selected Field experience Readings, projects activities to attain competencies
Evaluation of successful attainment of competencies by instructor
Completion of coursework, field experience, practica
Post-assessment competency self-rating scale oral or written comps